

Philosophy and Nation Building: The Case of the Philippines

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ABSTRACT: The Philippines, being a divided nation, is still unable to catch up with the development of her Asian neighbors in the globalization process. Questions related to nationhood such as “Who is the Filipino?” and “Why is there a lack of patriotism among Filipino people?” remain despite the two historic events—the People Power I and II—showing the spirit of the Filipino. Filipino sociologist Randolph S. David defines nationhood as not a static concept based on territorial boundaries, common language, religion, shared history and cultural heritage but a project, a continuing work of creation that requires a solidarity that is based on national imaginary. This paper attempts to define the role of philosophy in the project of building the Filipino nation. It argues that the project of nationhood needs a philosophy that is recuperative, critical, and projective. The project entails a philosophy of history, a philosophy of education, and an ethics of discourse.

KEYWORDS: Filipino, nationhood, philosophy, critical, recuperative, projective

*The purpose of a fish trap is to catch fish, and when
the fish are caught, the trap is forgotten.*

*The purpose of a rabbit snare is to catch rabbits.
When the rabbits are caught, the snare is forgotten.*

*The purpose of words is to convey ideas.
When the ideas are grasped, the words are forgotten.*

*Where can I find a man who has forgotten words?
He is the one I would like to talk to.*

CHUANG TZU (MERTON 1995, 154)

The above narrative of Chuang Tzu is titled by Thomas Merton "Means and Ends." In the story, the gatekeeper went through self-deprivation to express his sorrow over his father's death. But then he became a professional mourner, becoming the model of all other mourners. Mourning has become an end in itself (Sen 2000, 14).

It is true also of culture; culture is also a means to achieve freedom. And these two issues—economic development and cultural identity—are central to most if not all of the countries comprising the Southeast Asian region today. It takes a philosophical perspective to see that economic development and cultural identity are not ends in themselves but means to realize a greater freedom, the individual freedom to choose the lifestyle one has reason to live for and the social freedom to build the nation.

This paper is inspired by the articles of Randolph S. David in his column "Public Lives" in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* now published in a book titled *Nation, self and citizenship: An invitation to Philippine sociology* with introductory essays by Josephine Dionisio, Gerardo Lanuza and Arnold Alamon (David 2004). It attempts to define the role of philosophy in the project of building the Filipino nation. David holds and advocates the view that nationhood is created, and shares Richard Rorty's view of the pragmatism of philosophy and that its aim should be "to facilitate the conversation of cultures" (David 2007).

This view of philosophy as pragmatic and in dialogue with other cultures is not alien to the traditional philosophies of China, India, and Japan which philosophizing has always been intertwined with their history and religions. This is not the case with the Philippines which cannot boast of an ancient philosophical tradition and whose birth as a nation came as a rebellion against Catholic Spain and interrupted by the American and Japanese occupations. This lack of an ancient long tradition of philosophy and the struggle for nationhood pose both a challenge and responsibility to philosophical inquiry in the Philippines, in the face of a globalizing process that has made the country lag behind its Asian neighbors.

This paper is a modest contribution to this challenge and responsibility.

A Nation in Conflict

The Philippines today is a divided nation, mired by the cultures of poverty and corruption. The two are intertwined: Poverty breeds corruption, and corruption aggravates poverty.

Poverty stares us at the eyes: In the increasing number of children selling sampaguitas and rugs or knocking at car windows, in the low survival rate of children in school (for every 100 children entering Grade 1, only sixty-seven will complete elementary schooling), in the mushrooming of squatter colonies in urban areas, in families living under bridges and overpasses, in children and adults scavenging at garbage dumps, as well as in the recent Social Weather Station (SWS) survey of rising incidence of hunger (one in every five Filipino families suffered "involuntary hunger at least once in the past three months)" (Mercado 2007, A10). It does not help us to see this reality when former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo first reacted by saying that she too missed a meal sometimes because of heavy work, or when our government statistics told us that poverty incidence among Filipino families dropped by about 3 percentage points from 27.5 percent in 2000 to 25.7 percent in 2003 simply because they revised the old poverty threshold of PhP 13,823 per person per year of 2000 to PhP 11,605 in 2003 (Philippine Daily Inquirer 2005, A16). In a recent SWS survey (December 2013), an estimated 11.8 million Filipino families rated themselves as poor, while some 8.8 million families said they were "food-poor." But David argues (2004, 94):

[P]overty is not defined by hunger alone. Being poor also means being abandoned as children while parents work abroad. It means having to grow up in neighborhoods infested by drug pushers and assorted criminals. It means going to sub-standard public schools run by underpaid and cynical teachers who can offer no hope. It means being formed by an escapist culture of cheap thrills, sexy tabloids and violent movies, with no vision of life of sublimity or beauty.

The country used to be second only to Japan in the postwar period in terms of capacity for economic growth. Today it is "nearly at the bottom of the heap in Southeast Asia," with almost half of the population living in absolute poverty (David 2004, 99-100). David understands this poverty as

the product of two realities: First, the reality of economic underdevelopment and second, the reality of inequality. The first came as a result of the nation's "special" trade relationship with the United States in return for hosting the American bases. Because of her reliance on American patronage, the country lost the opportunity to modernize, and raise productivity to compete in the world market. The second is that whatever wealth is produced, it is the rich who capture most of it, "while the poor get poorer, or are completely excluded from the mainstream production process itself and from the market. Their dwindling share of the nation's product prevents them from transforming themselves into more productive members of society" (David 2004, 99).

Two cultures exist then in Philippine society today: 1) The culture of the elite and, 2) the culture of the *masa*, the masses, the poor, with the bulk of them living in the countryside. In the cities like Makati, they occupied the squatter colonies that surround tall buildings and mansions. A typical scene of these two cultures is a family fine dining in a restaurant while outside there are children rummaging for leftover food in the garbage drum.

The lack of job opportunities in the country has driven many Filipinos to work in other countries as domestic helpers, entertainers, nurses, drivers, laborers, technicians, and teachers. Although the remittance of the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) has kept the economy floating and raised the value of the peso, the diaspora has its negative effects: Brain drain, low agricultural productivity, breakup of families, and children growing up without the guidance of either a mother or father and seeking guidance from their peers. The recent growing demand for Filipino nurses abroad is a case in point. Many colleges and universities offered nursing courses. Doctors were going back to school to get a nursing degree. With this trend, pretty soon hospitals will lack not only nurses but doctors.

The culture of poverty has brought crisis in the country's basic educational system. The poor go to public elementary and high schools where tuition is free, while the rich go to expensive private schools. "What ultimately spells the difference between the costly private schools and the free public schools is access to competent teachers, textbooks, classrooms and other learning resources"

(David 2004, 102). In a recent national examination for elementary school graduates, the average score was 57 percent, way below the 75 percent passing score. Also statistics released by the Department of Education (DepEd) show that only six out of ten will complete Grade 6. The reason is again poverty, because while tuition is free the pupils will need money for transportation and school projects, and to feed their hungry stomachs.

For a long time, DepEd was known to be one of the government agencies riddled with corruption in the procurement of educational materials.

On the culture of corruption, the Philippines still remains one of the most corrupt countries in Asia. This is not to say that corruption is limited to the government, but with a corrupt government, people are more susceptible to corruption. In the published *Cross-sectoral study of corruption in the Philippines* by the Committee for the Evangelization of Culture of the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus, "the wide range of responses on notions about corruption seemed to reflect both the pervasiveness of the phenomenon in the various sectors of the society as well as a lack of agreement on what constitute it" (2000, viii). According to one of the corruption surveys of the SWS, "one of every five Filipino managers say that 'almost all' firms in their line of business give bribes to win government contracts, while three of every five say they were asked for a bribe on at least one transaction last year" (Philippine Daily Inquirer 2007, A1).

But what is corruption? Definitions are grouped into three brackets: 1) The market-centered orientation looks at the corrupt official as behaving like a businessman making use of his office to maximize profit in the process of exchange and the balance between supply and demand; 2) The public-interest centered approach defines corruption as "an act of an office holder which favors one special section of the public that gives the rewards not legally provided for, thus, resulting in damage to the common interest of the general public" (Philippine Daily Inquirer 2007, 11); 3) The public-office centered perspective sees corruption as "an act which violates, or deviates from, the formal rules of a public office because of private-regarding gains" (Philippine Daily Inquirer 2007, 11-12). Corruption is differentiated from graft in that corruption is "the use of public office or the betrayal of public

trust for private gain,” while graft is “the acquisition of gain in a dishonest or questionable manner” (Philippine Daily Inquirer 2007, 12). Corruption can take many forms, such as bribery, extortion, fraud, nepotism, graft, speed money, pilferage, theft, embezzlement, falsification of records, kickbacks, influence-peddling, and campaign contributions (Philippine Daily Inquirer 2007, 13). We can add vote buying, vote padding (*dagdag-bawas*) and calling an election commissioner (*Hello Garci!*). In all these definitions of corruption, the common or public good is sacrificed in favor of one’s own personal gain, such as the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) indicating a lack of collective conscience.

Why this lack of a collective conscience among Filipinos? David traces it to the failure of the state and religion to forge a social solidarity due to their colonial origins. Unlike traditional societies like Thailand and Korea, where moral consensus first developed under a unifying religion and matured under a despotic ruler, Philippine society did not have any unifying religion or government to serve as moral authority. “Pre-Spanish moral communities were no bigger than clans,” and “progress to nationhood was many times intercepted by colonialism” (David 2004, 281). “Thus, even in contemporary times, we imagine ourselves foremost as brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers of our families instead of as citizens of a nation. We practice a high degree of responsibility for our family members even as we continue to remain indifferent to the social issues that affect one and all” (Alamon 2004, 266). Philippine society is, in the words of the historian Alfred McCoy, “an anarchy of families” (David 2004, 28).

The cultures of poverty and corruption are attributed to poor governance in the history of the Filipino nation. Leadership in the country is characterized by patronage instead of service to the people. Although the country was the first to establish a republic in Asia, democracy has remained in form but not in substance. “People regard their leaders as *patrons* who provide for their needs in exchange for their political loyalty during the elections” (Alamon 2004, 267). The political leader is known in the Filipino lexicon as the *trapo*, literally meaning “a piece of cloth used for cleaning,” but referring to the traditional politician (‘tra’ for ‘traditional’ and ‘po’ for ‘politician’) “who

uses wealth to buy power, exploits the poverty of his constituents through selective patronage, and treats public funds and facilities as if they were his own personal resources” (David 2004, 151).

A long history of poor governance has also brought about the Moro secessionist movement in the South, the communist rebellion in the countryside, the marginalization of ethnic minorities such as the Aetas of the Luzon and the *Lumads* of Mindanao, among others, and language rebellion of the Visayans.

The Moro rebellion in Southern Mindanao cannot be attributed simplistically to religious differences between Christians and Muslims, nor to ethnic superiority of Christians over Muslims, for sometimes Filipinos do draw from the richness of Moro culture to define the roots of their pre-colonial being (David 2004, 73). No doubt, land ownership is an essential issue in the conflict as decades ago Filipinos from the North settled in the ‘Land of Promise’ that was Mindanao, tilting and titling lands, displacing their inhabitants that were the Muslims and lumads (non-Muslim natives). “The Moros have not forgotten their struggles against outsiders because they have always resisted being ruled by others. Filipinos on the other hand have generally forgotten that they became Filipinos in the context of colonial subjugation” (David 2004, 73). Post-colonial governments continued the colonial masters’ paradigm of integration and pacification using military force. The Moros for centuries were depicted as pirates, kidnappers, bandits, and untrustworthy people inclined to run amuck when provoked. Even the media today would oftentimes add the word “Muslim” to a robber or criminal when he is one but not the word “Christian” to a Christian lawbreaker. This stereotyping of the Moros grows out of a “system of governance that conforms only to the interests and nuances of the largely lowland Christian population” (Montalvan 2007):

The Moro problem is not a problem of political integration and social assimilation. It is rooted in our failure to recognize difference, and to multiply those opportunities in which we can mutually think of one another as sharing similar intentions in a land that by accident we commonly inhabit. This is a slow painstaking process. We cannot begin to solve the problem by self-

righteously asserting the inviolability of our constitution and proving this by the might of our army. Our constitution has not protected or benefited the Moros; they are right to reject it. And no army can end this problem unless it is prepared to commit genocide (David 2004, 74-75).

The long protracted rebellion of the leftist New People's Army (NPA) can also be blamed on the government for her failure to promote social justice in the country. When Corazon Aquino became president, she granted amnesty to those who would give up their arms and this paved the way for a new constitution that allow leftist parties to become members of Congress. But the continued killings of leftist leaders and of anti-administration media men, particularly during the previous administration, brought the country back to the martial law years of Ferdinand Marcos.

The problem of the Aetas is again due to poor governance. The Aetas were the original settlers of the archipelago, long before the Malay immigrants, who were pushed back to the mountains from their coastline and river dwellings. There was even a time that they were charging the Malays taxes in kind for the use of the land. The American colonial government designated a reservation area for them at the foot of Mt. Pinatubo. But since the 1960s loggers have intruded into their protected area. The Philippine government simply created an understaffed and underfunded office, the Office for Northern Cultural Communities (ONCC), to do away with the problem. When Mt. Pinatubo erupted, the Aetas descended from their dwelling and roamed the streets of Manila, begging. And during the Christmas holiday season, they can be seen again in the streets of Manila. The Aetas "bring up the past. They interrogate our values. And their mute presence comes as a question: (W)ho owns this country?" (David 2004, 68). Are not the Aetas also Filipinos?

Nowhere is the question of Filipino identity more pronounced than in the issue of the national language. The Constitution mandates the establishment of national language commission to develop, propagate, and preserve the Filipino and other languages. The reality is that this has never been done, and the Filipino language continues to be Tagalog-based, eliciting a kind of language rebellion from the people in the South who insist on using their own regional language. Aggravating the problem is the executive order of former

President Macapagal Arroyo mandating the use of English as the medium of instruction in schools to improve the English proficiency of Filipinos, as well as to answer to the demands of globalization, in particular to make them qualified for jobs in call centers.

Regionalism rather than nationalism prevails in the associations of Filipinos abroad: Various Filipino associations abroad are based on regions such as Bicolanos, Cebuanos, Ilongos, etc. A Filipino relates more to his region than to the nation.

This is not to say, however, that Filipinos are bereft of the spirit of patriotism. The two People Power revolutions in 1986 and 2001 were shining moments of the Filipinos' love for country, rising above self, family, region, religion, and ethnicity. The challenge is to make this a reality in the daily lives of the Filipinos. And this involves the notion of nationhood as a creation.

Nation Building as a Project

Following Ernest Gellner's view, David holds that "the nation is neither a destiny nor an end in itself but rather a continuing work of creation for the fulfillment of individual happiness" (Dionisio 2004, 4). Gellner opposes the view that the nationhood is a fundamental aspect of human organization and is as old as human society itself (Dionisio 2004, 21). For him, the concept of nation emerged only in the late 1800s in the transformation of Europe into a modern industrialized society. The industrial economy with its new division of labor required a mobile and continuously changing workforce with new set of skills that can no longer be learned at home or in the parish. Thus a secular educational system was established with standardized curriculum and a common language for instruction. People from different places with diverse cultures became unified under this new system of education and division of labor, their differences suppressed by the state. "Nation building became a euphemism for homogenization. The claim of most modern states that they constitute a unified nation with their common boundaries can, therefore, be seen as a myth that became congenial to solidifying the emerging nation-states in Europe" (Dionisio 2004, 11). A nation therefore is not really

founded on some inherent common characteristic of a group of people but simply “the organization of human groups into a large, centrally educated, culturally homogeneous units” (Dionisio 2004, 11).

In the case of the colonies like the Philippines, the myth of nationalism served as an inspiration in the struggle for liberation. But after independence was finally won, the differences resurfaced and gave birth to new conflicts. Franz Fanon thus argues against the notion that nationhood is based on factors like common language, shared history or cultural heritage (Dionisio 2004, 12). In the case of the Philippines, the Filipino nation was partly an invention of European-educated Filipino intellectuals who, inspired by the upheavals in Europe in the 1800s, used the native language in print media to disseminate the narrative of a people denied of their right to national identity. In fact, the national hero Dr. Jose Rizal, who could speak several languages, likened the Filipino who can not speak his own native language to a stale fish. But after the revolutionaries won the war against Spain, the Americans took over the islands, followed by the Japanese. Filipino nationalists fought against the Americans, and later allied with them against the Japanese, which victory tied the country to protect American investments in the country and to keep the military bases for a long time. Thus, in the 1970s, nationalism took the form of anti-imperialism and factions soon surfaced in the categories of “leftist,” “rightist,” “moderate,” “left of center,” “right of center,” etc., until then President Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972. The manner in which Filipinos surrendered their freedom to the authoritarian rule of Marcos and bearing with it for fourteen years showed a “romanticized view of democracy, forgetting the simple truth that the presumed advantages of democracy may not be obvious to—because they are not objectively felt by—the vast majority of the people. A people besieged by extreme poverty, persistent injustice, and lack of social mobility will always feel it has nothing to lose by betting on a forceful figure who presents himself as a social reformer” (David 2004, 160).

Murtada Mutahhri shares Fanon’s view that a shared history, a common language or cultural heritage are not essential elements of national integration. “At the root of nationalism...is a people’s sense of common suffering combined with a shared dream for an alternative future” (Dionisio 2004, 12). This sense

of common suffering burst into the People Power of 1986, but its euphoria did not last long enough to inspire successive administrations to provide structures to alleviate poverty and curb corruption. And when corruption epitomized itself in the presidency of Joseph Estrada, People Power rose again to unify the people. But after that, nothing has changed; poverty continues to drive increasingly Filipinos away from their home to other countries in search for jobs, and the Muslim conflict in Mindanao remains unresolved. Dionisio (2004, 6) further says “that solidarity based on national identity remains weak in the Philippines is probably best articulated by the state’s failure to provide its citizens with an acceptable reason to remain Filipino.” On the part of the Filipino citizens is the lack of a “shared vision for an alternative future.”

Nationalism or patriotism “need not be grounded on primordial ties based on a shared cultural heritage or ethnic origin. One need not look for a true Filipino identity, it is enough to invent one” (Dionisio, 7). Nationhood is created, a project of a people who dream of an alternative future. Citing Benedict Anderson, Dionisio (2004, 7) insists that “a nation is an imagined community because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives an image of their community.”

This project of creating a nation is even more imperative in the face of the homogenizing and alienating tendencies of globalization. The state must seize this project by exercising creative and effective governance, “ensuring that the breakneck pace of globalization will not worsen the already pathetic quality of life of most Filipinos” (Dionisio 2004, 8). This will require the concerted efforts of the government, the business sector, and civil society to provide the basic necessities of the people so that the “Filipino” will not be synonymous with “the maid in European or Singaporean homes, a prostitute or a dancer in Japan, and an underpaid seaman in a foreign cargo-boat” (David 2004, 78). In the face of the homogenization of culture of globalization, the project challenges us to refashion nationhood “away from the arrogance of ethnocentrism,” to embrace cultural diversity (Dionisio 2004, 13).

The project of nationhood entails a rereading of the nation’s past with the view of creating the nation’s destiny. “A nation needs to continuously redescribe

its historical milestones as it attempts to use history as a guide to the present” (Dionisio 2004, 7). For example, the historian Ambeth Ocampo shares the different interpretations he went through of the coming of Ferdinand Magellan to the islands in 1521. As a boy, he was taught that “Magellan discovered the Philippines,” and “even thought that the villains in the story were the half-naked savages led by Lapu-Lapu, who killed the first tourist to our shores” (Ocampo 2009, 8). Later, he was corrected by the historian Gregorio Zaide: “Magellan did not discover the Philippines, he merely ‘rediscovered’ it—for how can he discover a place that already had people in it?” (Ocampo 2009, 8). In college, he met another historian Teodoro A. Agoncillo who disagreed with the word “rediscovered”—“Did the Philippines disappear under the sea and come up again for Magellan to re-discover it? How can you re-discover what is not lost?” (Ocampo 2009, 8). Now Ambeth Ocampo, in writing his own version of Philippine history, will simply say that “Magellan arrived in the Philippines in 1521.” Our reading into the nation’s history should therefore be instructive in the making of the nation.

The project of building a nation also entails a new dealing with the state. The state should “welcome the possibility that individual citizens may nurture multiple nationalisms,” recognizing “the right of ethnic groups to choose, assert, and enrich their own culture and identity thus enabling them to chart their own development as a people” (Dionisio 2004, 13). Cultural diversity, however, “can thrive more fruitfully in a situation where everyone regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation is able to collect economic and political benefits from the state” (Dionisio 2004, 14). Nationhood requires accountability on the part of the state, that it should “put in place structures that would ensure sustained productive and meaningful employment for an increasing population... A state without a coherent plan and a deliberate attempt to develop a manufacturing and industrial sector, watches passively as its cities become mere service centers for foreign companies, where jobs are limited, temporary, and unstable” (Dionisio 2004, 14).

Building a nation requires a constant reinvention of its institutions. The first institution that needs to be reinvented is the family. The family needs to be reoriented through the retelling of stories that “expands its concept of kin,

and to widen the mantle of its nurturing to include those who are deprived, abandoned, or exploited” (Dionisio 2004, 16).

Next to be reinvented is the educational system of the nation, for education is the nation’s investment into the future. The present basic education system of the Philippines is evidently inadequate to enable the citizens to participate meaningfully in the building of the nation. Basic skills of reading, writing, and doing arithmetic need to be ensured with the cooperation of the business sector and civil society. “Without these skills, an individual is prone to victimization and exploitation” (Dionisio 2004, 16). In the secondary level, the teaching of values education should not be a separate subject but integrated into the different subjects, and the teaching of the nation’s history should not be just informative but formative, inculcating the value of patriotism. In the tertiary level, “universities must be able to assert themselves in this context by cultivating a type of liberal education that would ‘enlarge the horizons and explore utopias,’ as well as inspire self-reflection and hope in every generation... The state needs to invest in the education of young intellectuals to whom it may bequeath the task of nationhood” (Dionisio 2004, 16).

The project of nation building requires the rebuilding of political institutions to make democracy work in the concrete lives of the people. This means democratizing our political institutions (such as the Commission on Elections) so that there can be more meaningful participation in decision-making for the majority of the people. “An elitist electoral system that screens out the participation of the majority in the political arena by focusing on personalities and material capabilities should be replaced by one that focuses on educational campaigns and a debate on issues” (Dionisio 2004, 17).

Together with the rebuilding of political institutions is the overhauling of economic institutions. The country is not lacking in natural resources but it remains poor because they have not been harnessed for the majority but exploited for the private interests of the few. Agricultural development must go hand in hand with industrialization. And private corporations must embark on corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs.

The power of the media in nation building cannot be underestimated. “Media is a public trust,” and must be “made conscious of their responsibility towards

the public," which is "to educate their viewers by providing them with carefully thought-out and sensitive presentations" (Dionisio 2004, 19). They need to be more imaginative, resisting stereotyping and sensationalism in presenting the truth and to contribute to the concept of "human" and "human rights" that is more inclusive. Instead of producing more escapist entertainment "media should refocus their attention to the task of nationhood, and to its mission of rewriting a fitting narrative for the Filipino nation" (Dionisio 2004, 19).

Religious institutions too can contribute to the task of building the nation. The present Philippine Constitution states the inviolability of the separation of church and state, and allows the free exercise of one's belief and worship. But this culture of pluralism and tolerance is still very much in the process of formation in the country (David 2004, 133). "A Filipino nation that is more respectful of 'otherness' should be able to embrace a variety of beliefs" (Dionisio 2004, 19). With respect to religious practices, these must be seen as expressions of one's spirituality but which "syncretically weave their unique fabric from every available material," and are therefore necessarily historical, and hence, artifacts of culture. Our religious practices should be made meaningful to the nation, because "with faith comes the responsibility to employ reason in constantly reassessing even our most sacred beliefs and practices. Deepening our faith means 'to divorce religiosity from habit, (and) to reinvent the Church as a valuable human institution in an evolving society'" (Dionisio 2004, 19).

Dionisio (2004, 12) sums up this project of nationhood in the following words:

Our generation is faced with the challenge to reinvent a narrative of the nation that is conscious of the contingency of its solidarity as a nation, thus creating a nation that is less demanding and more tolerant. The task of nationhood in this sense is to allow the flourishing of individuals who nurture varying affinities and identities, and by accident, are forced to live together in a common space and time. The creative faculties of this generation need to be harnessed toward building a nation where no one is a foreigner, where the link between nation and individual can be mediated by other forms of solidarity, and whose collective hatred would only be directed towards the abhorrence of war. Nationhood should be able to recognize,

tolerate, respect, and protect affinities and identities that may be based on race and ethnicity, gender, and class. Nationhood is not an end in itself. It is a continuing process of broadening the limits of our imagined community.

Philosophy and Building the Filipino Nation

Given this enormous task of building the Filipino nation, what then is the role of philosophy in such a project?

The first task of philosophy, I believe, is *recuperative*. To create a nation is to go back to the nation's past, to reread, reinterpret, and rewrite the narrative(s). Doing history, however, presupposes a philosophy of history. The historian organizes his knowledge of the past not "independently of the framework of his own life-practice [*Lebenspraxis*]" (Habermas 1977, 350). The life-practice of the historian is a horizon of expectations, the goal-settings, "in the light of which every relevant event can in principle be described as completely as possible for the practically effective self-understanding of a social life-world" (Habermas 1977, 350). A philosophy of history is a reflection of the past in the anticipation of the future to understand the present. "Without philosophy of history, no historical event can be completely represented" (Habermas 1977, 349).

This recuperative task of philosophy also applies to tradition, not only to religious practices but more importantly to the traditional values of the nation. Philosophy must reflect on what traditional values of the Filipinos can be tapped for nation building. A good example that comes to mind is the value of *bayanihan*, in the past symbolized in Filipinos carrying the *nipa* house of their neighbor for transfer. Today, the Couples of Christ (CFC) has successfully carried this out in the *Gawad Kalinga 777 Project*,² mobilizing Filipinos in the country and overseas and foreigners to build homes for the homeless and to provide livelihood and values education to their families.

David cites Nietzsche's three uses of history that correspond to three kinds of history: *Monumental, antiquarian, and critical* (David 2004, 24-26). History is remembering the past. We remember the greatness of past generation's struggle for independence to inspire us in our present struggles.

But this can be mythified, and this is where antiquarian history is used to counter it. But antiquarian history can also result in mummification, which is why, critical history is important. Critical history “demands the ability to repudiate institutions, an entire way of life inherited from the past, a first nature given to us by tradition—in the interest of a new discipline that allows us to free ourselves from that which shackles us” (David 2004, 25-26).

This brings us to what I believe is the second task of philosophy in nation building—*critical*. Nation building requires a new dealing with the state, that it be responsive to the basic needs of the people. Philosophy acts as a critique to the state’s policies and laws, evaluating them in the light of what is ethical (what is good for the community) and what is moral (what is just for all).³ It criticizes the state’s authoritarian tendencies, reexamining the meaning of democracy in the context of a pluralistic society. In concrete, philosophical reflection is needed on the state’s notion of property, landed or intellectual, in view of what best benefits the poor.

Philosophical reflection is intrinsically self-reflective; it criticizes not only the other but one’s own self, both the personal and the social or institutional. On the personal, philosophical reflection asks of oneself, “What have I done to alleviate poverty or curb corruption?” This brings us to the relevance of the “ethics of the face” or the “responsibility for the Other” of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. What do I do when a street kid knocks on my car window? Knock back? David says, “Since reading Levinas, I have found it impossible to do that and not morally acknowledge the presence of faces peering through the closed windows of cars on the streets of Manila” (David 2004, 338).

On the social level, reinventing our institutions for nation building entails self-critiquing our family values, educational system, political institutions, economic institutions, the media, the church we belong to, and our faith. Self-reflexivity asks the questions: Is my family a closed one, seeking the interest only of the clan, or open, embracing other destitute families? Is my institution responsive to the other? Philosophy examines the virtue of tolerance: Is it simply a passive acceptance of the other’s belief and conviction, or a celebration of difference?

Philosophy in nation building, however, must not contend itself only with recollecting and critiquing; it must also be *projective* of the future. It must offer alternatives ways of living together, of new forms of solidarity, of—in the philosophy of Richard Rorty—“a better society where there is less cruelty, pain and humiliation; where democratic subjects are given as much space to practice their idiosyncratic and sublime practices” (Alamon 2004, 277). Philosophy as projective is a philosophy of hope in the way that Gabriel Marcel (1951) speaks of hope as creative, intersubjective, and transcendent. Hope is creative in the sense that the person will not fall into cynicism, inaction, or despair but will “find a way.” Hope is intersubjective and transcendent because hope expresses itself authentically in “I hope in Thee for us.” Hope cannot be separated from love or compassion or generosity and from a belief in a Transcendent.

These three simultaneous roles of philosophy must find their way in the philosophy of education of our schools, private or public; in the mission-vision statements of business corporations and civil societies, and in religious institutions as well. In the public sphere of Philippine society, they take the form of a discourse ethics of Habermas, where social issues are discussed, argued, validated with the aim of reaching a consensus, using the force of the better argument in place of arms.

In the end, the role of philosophy in nation building is “to ground our national identity in universal values that are shared by the rest of the human community” (David 2004, 79). Values such as honesty, integrity, transparency, courage, selflessness or generosity, and love of country.

With the examples of the martyred nationalist Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino and the icon of the first People Power revolution Corazon “Cory” Aquino, and with the *Daang Matuwid* doctrine of the younger Aquino, President Noyonoy or “PNoy,” we refuse to give up hope and commit ourselves to building a nation. Together we can make this nation Filipino, where every citizen is proud to be Filipino.

Notes

- ¹ This paper was presented at the Philosophers' Rally held on 15 February 2014 at the Ateneo de Davao University.
- ² *Gawad Kalinga* means "Giving Care." It aims to build 700,000 homes in 7,000 communities in seven years.
- ³ The distinction is that of Jürgen Habermas in his work "On the Pragmatic, the Ethical, and the Moral Employments of Practical Reason," published in *Justification and application, remarks on discourse ethics* (The MIT Press, 1993), 1-17.

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